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SUBJECT: SWAZILAND OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL  
(OSAC) CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT - 2009

REF: 08 STATE 132056

11. The following comprises Post Mbabane's submission for the 2009 OSAC Crime and Safety Report, based on the REFTEL:

1I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

1A. The Department of State has designated Swaziland as a Critical Threat Crime Post. Criminals consider Mbabane, the capital city, and Manzini, Swaziland's urban industrial center, prime grounds for operation due to the number of people, businesses and affluent areas. Additionally, crime affects urban and rural areas due to limited police assets. Criminals will resort to force if necessary, including deadly force, in order to accomplish their goal. Gangs are not deterred by confrontations with their intended victims. Car-jackings are not uncommon and can be violent if victims do not cooperate. Crime increases dramatically during the holiday season.

Congested urban areas are particularly dangerous at night, but daytime incidents do occur. The presence of others on the street should not be misinterpreted as an indication of security. Many victims report being robbed in the presence of large numbers of witnesses, who are unwilling to intervene. Pedestrians are cautioned not to wear jewelry or carry expensive items in open view. All visitors are advised against displaying large amounts of cash, flashy jewelry, expensive clothing items or cellular telephones. Walking around at night, either alone or in a group, is strongly discouraged.

Most residents in Swaziland take residential security seriously and attempt to protect their homes accordingly. Perimeter walls, security guards, dogs, security lighting, window grills, and alarm systems with response teams are essential for ensuring the safety of residents. Burglaries and home invasions occur frequently. Gangs, armed with knives or firearms, target homes and offices they suspect possess cash or valuables. Criminals go so far as to taunt residents by attempting robberies in broad daylight.

The city of Manzini, Swaziland's biggest city located approximately 30 kilometers southeast of Mbabane, is notorious for criminal activity. The bus rank in Manzini, into which most inter city transportation must pass before traveling throughout the country, is routinely cited as being dangerous. In the past year, criminals have frequently targeted banks (cash deliveries) and Automatic Teller Machines (ATM). These types of crimes are organized involving explosives, metal grinders, firearms and multiple vehicles. Police response is often met with gunfire regardless of the time of day or location.

1B. Traffic accidents in Swaziland are the second greatest danger for any visitor. Use extreme caution when on the road as drivers are prone to excessive speeding and reckless behavior. Other road hazards that visitors should be aware of include: poor lighting, failure to obey traffic signals, presence of pedestrians on roadways, farm animals on roadways, slower moving vehicles on the

road, large trucks delivering heavy cargo, drunk drivers, poorly maintained roads, extreme weather (heavy fog, rain, hail), and erratic stopping by other vehicles.

Traffic drives on the left in Swaziland, which requires US drivers to exercise particular caution. Due to the numerous hazards, special care should be used in driving at night, especially in rural areas. Major highways in Swaziland are generally maintained, well paved and adequately marked around the major cities. Most major thoroughfares in the cities are paved, though in various states of repair.

Avoid driving at night outside low-density areas. Rural and suburban areas alike are ill lit and pose additional safety hazards due to pedestrians and animals crossing the roads. Vehicles are not well maintained and often lack headlights. Large trucks park on the side of the road without using emergency flashers or warning signs.

Keep automobile doors locked and windows rolled up at all times. Do not roll down your window in the event someone approaches your vehicle. Ignore persons outside your vehicle and drive away if you feel uncomfortable. While stopped in urban traffic, continue to scan rearview mirrors to identify potential trouble. Always use your seatbelt.

Do not stop your vehicle if you encounter rocks or logs in the middle of the road. This is a technique used in Swaziland and South Africa for robbers to force vehicles to stop. Either drive around the barriers or turn around. Do not stop to assess the situation.

Secure all items out of view, by placing them either in the trunk or under the seat. While idling at a light or stop sign, leave adequate maneuver room between your vehicle and the one in front so that you can expedite your departure should the need arise. Park only in well lit areas; preferably lots with a security guard.

## II. Political Violence:

1A. In the past few years, there have been multiple attacks against Government of Swaziland buildings and governmental residences utilizing Molotov cocktails. These attacks occurred in the early morning hours with limited damage to personnel or facilities. In 2008, there have been multiple incidents involving improvised explosives devices (IEDs). Most of the targets have been bridges, though none of bridges sustained structural damage. One incident involved a small IED placed in a trash bin outside a Kentucky Fried Chicken establishment in Mbabane. Americans have not been targeted because of their nationality.

There is no evidence that indigenous groups exist that would use political violence against Americans to further their cause.

Civil unrest is usually not an issue in Swaziland, although public protests, demonstrations, and strikes are fairly common in response to ongoing labor and politically related difficulties, as well as the continued ban on political formations and meetings of a political nature.

When a strike is pending, the Royal Swaziland Police Service (RSPS) is usually called out to monitor the group. Americans are cautioned to stay away from any and all demonstrations in Swaziland, as the security forces have used force to disrupt such events. During the course of such events, police do not distinguish between "innocent bystanders" and protesters, and the possibility of becoming a collateral casualty should be a concern for Americans.

## III. Post-Specific Concerns:

1A. Flooding is rare in Swaziland, though rain can be quite heavy during the rainy season (October - April). Violent thunderstorms with heavy rainfall, hail and lightning are of particular concern. Hundreds of people are killed each year during heavy storms. If outdoors during a thunderstorm, seek shelter immediately.

1B. The use of public transportation by Americans is not

recommended. Mini-bus taxis, which follow fixed routes and are flagged down by passengers on the streets and roads of Swaziland, should be considered unsafe. Many of these vehicles fail to meet minimal safety standards and drivers frequently overload the vehicles and travel at excessive speeds. Fatal accidents involving these conveyances are very common. Taxis can be used, but check for references with a trusted source. Do not ride in taxis that are occupied with other persons besides the driver.

1C. Kidnappings have not occurred in Swaziland.

1D. Drugs, especially Dagga (marijuana), are present in Swaziland. Care should be taken to avoid being involved in any form of narcotics activity. Local penalties for narcotics violations are stiff.

#### IV. Police Response:

1A. The RSPS lacks the manpower, assets and training to respond to crime at a level expected in the United States. Communication within the police department and mobile units is poor and the lack of transportation is a severe obstacle to their timely response to an incident. Some rural areas have instituted community policing to augment the RSPS, but their effectiveness and professionalism varies greatly. Most foreign residents and local business owners rely on 24 hour private security companies to enhance their protective posture.

1B. Regardless of these limitations, the RSPS will assist any victims of a crime to the best of their abilities. Americans are strongly encouraged to file a police report at the nearest police station as soon as possible, after being a victim of a crime. English is widely spoken throughout the country. Retain a copy of the filed police report. There have been no reported cases of police harassment involving foreigners and the RSPS.

#### 1V. Medical Emergencies:

1A. Visitors should strongly consider purchasing private medical evacuation insurance due to the inadequacy of facilities, physicians and supplies in Swaziland. Any life threatening condition will require emergency evacuation by air. The closest medical facility that is equipped to handle serious medical emergencies is located in Nelspruit, South Africa (information listed below).

1B. In the Mbabane area, the following facilities should be contacted in a medical emergency:

- The Mbabane Clinic: (268) 404-2423/4/5
- 24-Hour Ambulance (Trauma Link): (268) 606-0911
- Mbabane Government Hospital: (268) 404-2111

In the Manzini area, the following facilities should be contacted in a medical emergency:

- Manzini Clinic: (268) 505-7430/9
- Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital: (268) 505-2211/2201

In the Lebombo region:

- Siteki Good Shepherd Hospital: (268) 343-4012

For additional medical assistance, the following can be utilized in South Africa:

-Private Hospital, Nelspruit, South Africa: 07-13-759-0500 (when dialing from Swaziland; 27-13-759-0500 (when dialing from outside of Swaziland or South Africa).

-Johannesburg Poison Center, Milpark Hospital: 07-114-805-688 (when dialing from Swaziland); 27-114-805-688 (when dialing outside of Swaziland or South Africa).

#### VI. Travel precautions:

1A. Visitors to Swaziland should exercise the same precautions as they would in any other urban area of the world. This guidance applies particularly to downtown areas at night, when robberies, muggings, and car-jackings are most common. Crimes common to urban destinations worldwide - hotel theft, pickpockets, muggings - are present in Swaziland. All visitors should use caution in the downtown areas and hotels, especially in the major cities. Travelers should use all available means to protect credit cards, financial information, and personal identification. In the event an American Citizen becomes a victim of a crime, he/she should immediately report the incident to the nearest police station or by calling 999 in the event of a life threatening emergency. If contact can not be made via telephone, drive to the nearest station and make a report in person.

The town of Manzini has more incidents of crime than any other city in Swaziland. Manzini is particularly dangerous on weekend nights. Additionally, caution should be used in very rural areas as criminals will target outsiders due to the extreme remoteness and lack of law enforcement coverage.

1B. Always be aware of the activity around you. Typical mugging in Swaziland involves a group of young males who surround and overwhelm the victim in a public area. An alert individual can often see this developing and initiate appropriate evasive actions. When departing a restaurant, always have vehicle keys ready, get inside the vehicle as quickly as possible, and lock all doors upon entry. If you observe a group of suspicious individuals, seek refuge in a safer place such as a store, restaurant, or place of business.

Be alert to distractions. Purse-snatchers will often work in teams of two with one man acting as a diversion. One man may engage the target in conversation or bump him/her on the street while the other grabs hand-carried valuables and flees. Carry purses and backpacks across your shoulder and move quickly when entering or departing stores.

Do not carry more cash and valuables than are necessary for the need at hand. Most hotels have safes inside each room and larger safes at the front desk. Statistically, people have not been harmed during street thefts when they did not offer resistance. Resist only if you feel your life is in danger. HIV/AIDS is prevalent and the possibility of an exchange of blood presents additional concerns.

Avoid traveling alone. Safety in numbers is better. Stick to well lit areas and never walk through parks or unlit public areas at night. Do not display or carry unnecessary valuables in public. Cell phones are of a particular interest to local thieves. Do not carry a cell phone on the waist or in other visible areas. One should always carry the phone in a purse, bag or backpack and remain on the alert when speaking on the phone in a public area.

Only convert money with authorized currency exchanges and never with street vendors. Exercise caution at cash machines, both in terms of strong arm robbery and stealthy ploys to jam the machine in order to steal the card. ATM machines are located in the larger cities in the country but should be used with caution.

Avoid any and all political rallies or demonstrations.

Although violence is not directed at Americans, these events can turn dangerous. Police are prone to using tear gas and batons to disperse crowds. Occasionally, rubber or real bullets may also be used as a means of dispersing crowds.

Be sure to read the Consular Information Sheet on Swaziland prior to travel for updated information and advice. U.S. Citizens are encouraged to register with the Consular section of the American Embassy upon arrival.

VII. Further Information:

1A. U.S. Embassy Mbabane Information:

PO Box 199  
Central Bank Building, Seventh Floor  
Warner Street  
Mbabane, Swaziland

Country code: 268  
Embassy Operator: 404-6441  
Regional Security Officer: 404-0283  
Consular Officer: 404-4820

After business hours contact the Embassy Duty Officer at  
602-8414.

Local Emergency Services: 999  
Police (Mbabane): 404-2221  
Fire Department: 404-3333  
Mbabane Police HQ: 404-2221  
Manzini Police HQ: 505-2221  
Airport Police: 518-5222

VIII. OSAC Country Council:

Swaziland's first Overseas Security Advisory Council meeting convened in 2007. The country council is comprised of local businesses, faith-based organizations and NGOs.  
Point of contact at Post is RSO Kevin W. Murphy, email:  
Murphykw2(at)state.gov or telephone: 268-404-0283.

12. Post appreciates the support of DS/OSAC and cordially invites them for a visit. In 2010, the Republic of South Africa will host the World Cup and it is anticipated Swaziland will receive a number of additional visitors due to its close proximity to the games.

PARKER